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December 11, 2001

The Honorable John Engler, Chair
National Governors Association
Hall of States
444 N. Capitol St.
Washington, D.C. 20001-1512

Dear Governor Engler:

I write to urge you to encourage the Governors to take advantage of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's offer of free potassium iodide to States that request it. You may be aware that the Food and Drug Administration released its final guidance on the use of potassium iodide in the event of a nuclear incident. A successful attack against a nuclear power plant could result in a massive release of radioactive materials with devastating consequences for public health. Vulnerable sub-populations, such as young children and pregnant women, could be disproportionately affected. While evacuation and sheltering are prudent responses to a radiological catastrophe, they are not the only options available. We must be fully prepared.

Studies done on children exposed to radioactive iodine released during the Chernobyl accident concluded that thousands of children developed thyroid cancers and other thyroid diseases as a direct result of the accident. Children were identified as the population most vulnerable to exposure to radioactive iodine. As demonstrated by studies done on Polish children, to whom potassium iodide (KI) was given after Chernobyl, these diseases could have been prevented with the administration of even a single dose of KI. Potassium iodide, when administered before or immediately after exposure, is nearly 100% effective in blocking the thyroid gland from absorbing radioactive iodine.

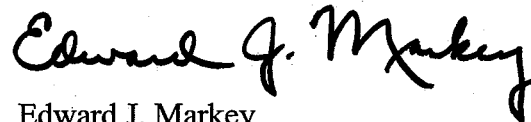
The safety and efficacy of KI was formally established as a matter of Federal policy on December 15, 1978, when the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) concluded that potassium iodide is a safe and effective means by which to block uptake of radioactive iodine by the thyroid gland in a radiological catastrophe, and approved its over-the-counter sale. In January 2001, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) found that potassium iodide is "a reasonable, prudent, and inexpensive supplement to evacuation and sheltering for specific local conditions." The NRC agreed to provide funding for a supply of KI to states, and has budgeted \$800,000 to pay for the KI, but was awaiting final guidance on dosage from the FDA before moving ahead with the program.

That day has arrived. Yesterday, the FDA issued its Guidance: Potassium Iodide as a Thyroid Blocking Agent in Radiation Emergencies, in which it finds that:

- "The effectiveness of KI as a specific blocker of thyroid radioiodine uptake is well established, as are the doses necessary for blocking uptake. As such, it is reasonable to conclude that KI will likewise be effective in reducing the risk of thyroid cancer in individuals or populations at risk for inhalation or ingestion of radioiodines."
- "For optimal protection against inhaled radioiodines, KI should be administered before or immediately coincident with passage of the radioactive cloud, though KI may still have a substantial protective effect even if taken 3 or 4 hours after exposure."
- "Timely administration to the public is a critical consideration ... and requires a ready supply of KI. State and local governments choosing to incorporate KI into their emergency response plans may consider the option of predistribution of KI to those individuals who do not have a medical condition precluding its use."

This Guidance removes the last remaining fiscal barrier to the provision of potassium iodide to the States. All that remains is for the Governors, or local officials designated by the Governors, to formally request potassium iodide from the NRC. We strongly encourage you to inform the Governors of this program and urge them to take advantage of it so that potassium iodide can get into the communities where it is needed *before* it is needed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Edward J. Markey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Edward" and last name "Markey" clearly legible.

Edward J. Markey
Member of Congress